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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 000230

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SUBJECT: JANUARY 17 WEAPONS SEARCH AT MAKHMOUR CAMP

Classified by: RRT Erbil Leader James Yellin, reasons 1.4  
(b) and (d)

This is a Regional Reconstruction Team Erbil cable.

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY: A key step has been taken in restoring civilian status to the Makhmour refugee camp for Kurdish refugees from Turkey: an arms search of the camp and surrounding area carried out by Iraqi Army units with MNF-I support. No weapons were found in the camp. The search was witnessed by international observers from the U.S. Regional Reconstruction Team (RRT), UNHCR, MNF-I, and the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI). The Iraqi Ministry of Displacement and Migration (MODM) also sent two observers. The UNHCR plans to conduct a camp census on January 26 and verification and registration in February. A cordon has been set-up to maintain the camp free of weapons. The search and security operation translates into action the GOI's previously stated willingness (reftels) to work with UNHCR to restore the civilian character of the camp. END SUMMARY.

#### CHRONOLOGY OF THE SEARCH

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¶2. (UC) 350 ethnically Kurdish troops from the Salamiyah and Makhmour Battalions of the Iraqi Army carried out a weapons search of the Makhmour camp on January 17. The camp houses more than ten thousand Kurdish refugees, primarily from Turkey, and is in Ninewah Province in northern Iraq, just across the Green Line from the Iraqi Kurdistan Region (IKR).

¶3. (SBU) The following is an approximate chronology of the search:

-- At 0610 Makhmour police set up a cordon outside the camp. The police were backed by 30 U.S. troops from B Battery, Fifth Battalion, Eighty-Second Field Artillery Regiment.

-- At 0630 Makhmour Mayor Abdul-Rahman Barzanji entered the camp and drove through its four sectors with camp council representatives to inform residents by loudspeaker about search procedures.

-- At 0830 the Salamiyah and Makhmour battalions began the search. 150 troops of the Salamiyah Battalion worked west to east in sectors three and four, and 200 troops from Makhmour Battalion worked west to east in sectors one and two. The Iraqi battalions were backed by 10 U.S. troops of the Military Training Team assigned to the Third Battalion, Third Brigade of the Second Iraqi Infantry Division.

-- At 0945 the following international observers entered the camp: RRT PolOff Cummings, UNHCR Head of Security for Iraq Charles Lynch-Staunton, UNHCR Head of Office in Erbil Khaled Siddiqi, UNHCR Assistant Field Officer Ferhad Abdul-Qader, U.S. Army SFC Charles Black, and the military advisor of UNAMI, Danish MNF-I LTC Steen Anderson. In addition to

international observers, Emad Ali and Sadiq Amir represented the Iraqi Ministry of Displacement and Migration (MODM).

¶4. (SBU) The observers witnessed searches of homes and public buildings and interviewed refugee families. The observers also gathered the views of the Makhmour mayor, the Makhmour police chief, the Makhmour Camp manager, and the deputy commanders of the two Iraqi Army battalions.

¶5. (SBU) The Iraqi Army completed the search in the camp at 1400 hours and on the outskirts at 1700 hours.

#### RESULTS OF THE SEARCH

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¶6. (SBU) The Iraqi Army found no weapons inside Makhmour camp.

¶7. (SBU) However, camp children led troops to seven 122mm high-explosive artillery rounds, without fuses, 600 meters northeast of the camp. During sweeps by the Iraqi Army battalions around the camp perimeter, troops located six illumination artillery rounds. The rounds were rusted, not stacked, and were on the surface in shallow gulleys. MNF-I and security personnel did not consider the rounds to be ready for use.

¶8. (C) The search appeared complete and appropriate. The UNHCR, UNAMI and MNF-I observers agreed that the camp is restored to civilian status, and that the timetable for a census on January 26 and for verification and registration in February will be followed as long as the present level of control is maintained. UNAMI security returned to Makhmour on January 20 and confirmed that adequate security measures were maintained following the search and are currently in

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place.

¶9. (SBU) Security in and around the camp will be maintained at a high level for UNHCR operations and to ensure the PKK does not regain access and no weapons enter. Baghdad and KRG authorities have tripled the Iraqi Police and Iraqi Army presence. Troops are rotated monthly to avoid development of close relations between guards and camp residents. All vehicles entering the camp are searched. Iraqi Army troops are conducting random weapons searches of homes and public buildings in the camp. The Iraqi Army established two observation posts on high ground around the camp, giving them visual contact with the entire perimeter, and observation towers are being constructed. Day and night security patrols are covering the camp and its perimeter.

#### NOTE ON IRAQI ARMY BATTALIONS

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¶10. (C) The Salamiyah Battalion (formerly known as the Third Battalion, Third Brigade, Second Division) had been in Makhmour for three years. It was abruptly transferred by Baghdad in early January and split between Mosul and Salamiyah in Ninawa Province. 150 troops of the Salamiyah Battalion, under deputy commander Major Marwan, were called back for the search operation at Makhmour because of their experience with the camp population.

¶11. (C) The Salamiyah Battalion was replaced by a unit now known as the Makhmour Battalion (the Third Battalion, Third Brigade, Second Division.) 200 troops of the Makhmour battalion participated in the search operation under deputy commander MAJ Aso.

#### COMMENT

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¶12. (C) The Iraqi Army battalions conducting the search, both from the Second Division under General Jamal, were not

informed of the mission until two days before execution. With minimal lead time and no prior experience, the battalions ) with active assistance from the U.S. Military Training Team ) performed competently.

¶13. (C) Cooperation between Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) and Ninewah authorities enabled this key step in the restoration of the civilian status of Makhmour Camp. This was a prerequisite for both the camp census and for the UNHCR verification and registration process that will determine how many residents intend to voluntarily return to Turkey.

¶14. (C) However, many Makhmour residents continue to insist that political changes inside Turkey including expanded Kurdish language rights, reconstruction of destroyed villages, as well as a general amnesty, are necessary for voluntary return. KRG authorities also continue to resist any large-scale local integration or resettlement of camp residents within the KRG.

¶15. (C) That the search turned up no weapons at all in a country awash in guns suggests that camp residents anticipated a weapons search before the publicized census operation January 26. However, the objective in searching the camp was to rid the camp of weapons in order to allow UNHCR to conduct further operations in a safe environment, allow the refugees to interact with UNHCR free from possible PKK intimidation or pressure, and maintain a security presence to deter the recurrence of PKK activities. That was accomplished. Moreover, the operation pushes forward the humanitarian process that could result in the voluntary return of refugees to Turkey or their resettlement. This is something that is good for all parties, and something that we should stress, independently from other (larger) issues relating to PKK in Iraq.

KHALILZAD